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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM CBS Nightwatch

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SUBJECT Senator Sasser/Aid to the Contras

CHARLIE ROSE: Congress and the Administration may be facing another showdown over President Reagan's support for the rebels in Nicaragua. There are reports the Pentagon handed over three small Air Force planes like these to the so-called Contras. Though small, the rocket-equipped planes greatly escalate rebel firepower in Nicaragua's guerrilla war.

Tennessee Senator Jim Sasser says the Defense Department has confirmed the transfer, which Sasser and others say may be in violation of the strict congressional limit on aid to the Contras. Senator Sasser joins us this morning to talk about it.

How did you get the information? This is a difficult story to follow and I want to make sure because there's some crucial questions to ask, because it may very well be, as some of your Democratic colleagues have said, in violation of the spirit and the letter of the law, the congressional cap of \$21 million in terms of support for the Contras. You have been a critic of support for the Contras in Nicaragua, and you're a Democratic Senator from Tennessee. But here is an issue in which you wrote to the Defense Department asking for some information. Where did your interest stem from? Pick up the story.

SENATOR JIM SASSER: Well, we really had to dig it out of the Defense Department. I had been told by people on the scene that there were three aircraft that had appeared at a case called Agua Cati (?) in Honduras that's operated by the Contras, three Cessna aircraft. And we became curious as to where these aircraft had come from and who was furnishing them to the Contras. So we did some digging and we found that these three aircraft were originally owned by the New York National Guard, who had transferred them to the Air Force Logistics Command at